



"Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?": Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7-12

By Bruce A. Lesh

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Every major measure of students historical understanding since 1917 has demonstrated that students do not retain, understand, or enjoy their school experiences with history. Bruce Lesh believes that this is due to the way we teach history lecture and memorization. Over the last fifteen years, Bruce has refined a method of teaching history that mirrors the process used by historians, where students are taught to ask questions of evidence and develop historical explanations. And now in his new book *Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?* he shows teachers how to successfully implement his methods in the classroom.

Students may think they want to be given the answer. Yet, when they are actively engaged in investigating the past the way professional historians do they find that history class is not about the boring memorization of names, dates, and facts. Instead, it's challenging fun. Historical study that centers on a question, where students gather a variety of historical sources and then develop and defend their answers to that question, allows students to become actual historians immersed in an interpretive study of the past.

Each chapter focuses on a key concept in understanding history and then offers a sample unit on how the concept can be taught. Readers will learn about the following:

Exploring Text, Subtext, and Context: President Theodore Roosevelt and the Panama Canal

Chronological Thinking and Causality: The Rail Strike of 1877

Multiple Perspectives: The Bonus March of 1932

Continuity and Change Over Time: Custer's Last Stand

Historical Significance: The Civil Rights Movement

Historical Empathy: The Truman-MacArthur Debate

By the end of the book, teachers will have learned how to teach history via a lens of interpretive questions and interrogative evidence that allows both student and teacher to develop evidence-based answers to history's greatest questions.

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Editorial Review

Review

'What the book intends to do, and what it does well, is provide a 'road map' for those who wish to teach historical thinking skills in the secondary classroom. Lesh has written a valuable book for history teachers at the secondary level.' --*The History Teacher*

'Teachers are shown how to teach history using interpretive questions and interrogative evidence in this exciting alternative to traditional history paths, recommended for any educator's collection.' --*Midwest Book Review*

About the Author

Edward L. Ayers is the President of the University of Richmond. He was educated at the University of Tennessee and Yale University, where he received his Ph.D. in American Studies. Previously Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia, where he began teaching in 1980, Ayers was named National Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation and the Council for the Support of Education in 2003. His book, *IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES: WAR IN THE HEART OF AMERICA, 1859-1863* (2003), won the Bancroft Prize for distinguished work on the history of the United States. *THE PROMISE OF THE NEW SOUTH: LIFE AFTER RECONSTRUCTION* (1992) won prizes for the best book on the history of American race relations and on the history of the American South. It was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. He is the co-editor of *THE OXFORD BOOK OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH* (1997) and *ALL OVER THE MAP: RETHINKING AMERICAN REGIONS* (1996). The World Wide Web version of *The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War* was recognized by the American Historical Association as the best aid to the teaching of history. His latest book is *WHAT CAUSED THE CIVIL WAR? REFLECTIONS ON THE SOUTH AND SOUTHERN HISTORY* (2005).

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